I’tikaaf

Definition

I’tikaaf means staying in the mosque for a specific purpose, which is to worship Allaah (may He be glorified). It is prescribed in Islam and is mustahabb according to the consensus of the scholars. Imaam Ahmad said, as was narrated from him by Abu Dawood: “I have not heard from any of the scholars that it is anything other than Sunnah.”

Al-Zuhri (may Allaah have mercy on him) said: “How strange the Muslims are! They have given up I’tikaaf, despite the fact that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) never abandoned this practice from the time he came to Madeenah until his death.”

The benefits of I’tikaaf

There are many hidden benefits in the acts of worship and much wisdom behind them. The basis of all deeds is the heart, as the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “In the body there is an organ which if it is sound, the entire body will be sound, and if it is corrupt, the entire body will be corrupt. That organ is the heart.” (Narrated by al-Bukhaari, 52; Muslim, 1599)

What corrupts the heart most is distractions and preoccupations – such as food, drink, sex, talking too much, sleeping too much and socializing too much, and other distractions – which divert people from turning to Allaah and cause the heart to be unfocused and unable to concentrate on worshipping Allaah. So Allaah has prescribed acts of worship, such as fasting, to protect the heart from the negative effects of these distractions. Fasting deprives a person of food and drink and sex during the day, and this denial of excessive enjoyments is reflected in the heart, which gains more strength for seeking Allaah and frees it from the chains of these distractions which distract a person from thinking of the Hereafter by occupying him with worldly concerns.

Just as fasting is a shield which protects the heart from the influences of physical distractions such as excessive indulgence in food, drink and sex, so I’tikaaf offers an immense hidden benefit, which is protection from the effects of excessive socializing. For people may

take socializing to extremes, until it has a similar effect on a person to the effects of over-eating, as the poet said:

“Your enemy was once your friend, so do not have too many companions,

For, as you see, most diseases come from food and drink.”

I’tikaaf also offers protection from the evil consequences of talking too much, because a person usually does I’tikaaf on his own, turning to Allaah by praying Qiyaam al-Layl, reading Qur’aan, making Dhikr, reciting du’aa’, and so on.

It also offers protection from sleeping too much, because when a person makes I’tikaaf in the mosque, he devotes his time to drawing closer to Allaah by doing different kinds of acts of worship; he does not stay in the mosque to sleep.

Undoubtedly a person’s success in freeing himself from socializing, talking and sleeping too much will help him to make his heart turn towards Allaah, and will protect him from the opposite.

The connection between fasting and I’tikaaf

No doubt when a person has all the means of purifying his heart by keeping away from all the things that can distract him from worship, this will be more effective in helping him to turn towards Allaah with devotion and humility. Hence the Salaf regarded it as mustahabb to combine fasting and I’tikaaf. Imaam Ibn al-Qayyim (may Allaah have mercy on him) said: “It was not reported that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) ever did I’tikaaf when he was not fasting. Indeed, ‘Aa’ishah said: ‘There is no I’tikaaf except with fasting.’” (Narrated by Abu Dawood, 2473)

Allaah did not mention I’tikaaf except in conjunction with fasting, and the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) did not do I’tikaaf except in conjunction with fasting.

The most correct opinion concerning the evidence which the majority of the Salaf agreed upon is: “that fasting is a condition of I’tikaaf. This is the view that was regarded as most correct by Shaykh al-Islam Abu’l-‘Abbaas Ibn Taymiyah.” (*Zaad al-Ma’aad*, 2/87, 88)

The view that fasting is a condition of I’tikaaf was narrated from Ibn ‘Umar and Ibn ‘Abbaas. It was also the view of Maalik, al-Oozaa’i

and Abu Haneefah, and different opinions were narrated from Ahmad and al-Shaafa'i.

With regard to the words of Ibn al-Qayyim (may Allaah have mercy on him), "It was not reported that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) ever did I'tikaaf when he was not fasting", there is some room for debate. It was reported that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) did I'tikaaf in Shawwaal (narrated by al-Bukhaari, 1928, and Muslim, 1173), but it was not proven whether he was fasting or not on these days when he did I'tikaaf.

The most correct view is that fasting is mustahabb for the one who does I'tikaaf, but it is not a condition of his I'tikaaf being valid.

<u>With the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) in his I'tikaaf</u>

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) did I'tikaaf during the first ten days of Ramadaan, then in the middle ten days, seeking Laylat al-Qadr, then it became clear to him that it was in the last ten days, after which he always spent them (the last ten days) in I'tikaaf.

Abu Sa'eed al-Khudri (may Allaah be pleased with him) said: "The Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) used to do I'tikaaf during the middle ten days of the month, and when the night of the twentieth had passed and the twenty-first had begun, he would go back to his home, and those who were doing I'tikaaf with him also went home. Then one month he made I'tikaaf on that night when he used to go home. Then he addressed the people, commanding them as Allaah willed, then he said: 'I used to spend these ten days in I'tikaaf, but now I want to spend these last ten days in I'tikaaf, so whoever used to do I'tikaaf with me, let him stay in his place of I'tikaaf. I was shown that night (Laylat al-Qadr) then I was made to forget it, so seek it during the last ten nights, in the odd-numbered nights. And I saw myself prostrating in water and mud.'

Abu Sa'eed said: it rained on the night of the twenty-first, and the roof of the mosque leaked in the place where the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) was praying. I looked at him when he had finished praying Subh (Fajr), and his face was wet with water and mud, so what he (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) had seen came to pass. And this was one of the signs of his Prophethood."

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) continued to do I'tikaaf during the last ten days of Ramadaan, as it was reported in *al-Saheehayn* from 'Aa'ishah (may Allaah be pleased with her), who said that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) used to spend the last ten days of Ramadaan in I'tikaaf until he died, then his wives continued to do I'tikaaf after he died. (Narrated by al-Bukhaari, 1921; Muslim, 1171).

During the year in which he (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) died, he spent twenty days in I'tikaaf (al-Bukhaari, 1939), i.e., the middle ten days and the last ten days. This was for a number of reasons:

1. In that year, Jibreel reviewed the Qur'aan with him twice (al-Bukhaari, 4712). It was appropriate for him to spend twenty days in I'tikaaf, so that he could review the entire Qur'aan twice.

2. He (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) wanted to increase his righteous deeds and do more acts of worship, because he (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) felt that his time (of death) was near, as we may understand from the words of Allaah (interpretation of the meaning):

   "When there comes the Help of Allaah (to you, O Muhammad against your enemies) and the Conquest (of Makkah).

   And you see that the people enter Allaah's religion (Islam) in crowds.

   So glorify the Praises of your Lord, and ask His forgiveness. Verily, He is the One Who accepts the repentance and Who forgives."

   [al-Nasr 110:1-3]

   So Allaah commanded His Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) to increase his *Tasbeeh* ("*Subhaan Allaah* – Glory be to Allaah") and his *Istighfaar* ("*Astaghfir-Allaah* – I seek the forgiveness of Allaah") towards the end of his life, and this is what he (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) did. Often when he did Rukoo' and Sujood, he would say, "*Subhaanak Allaahumma wa bi hamdik, Allaahumma ighfir li* (Glory and praise be to You, O Allaah. O Allaah, forgive me)" – in obedience to the commands of the Qur'aan. (Narrated by al-Bukhaari, 487, and Muslim, 484).

3. He (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) did that in gratitude to Allaah for the blessings that He had bestowed upon him of righteous deeds such as jihaad, teaching, fasting and qiyaam (praying at night), and for the blessings of the revelation of the Qur'aan to him, raising high his fame, and other favours that Allaah had bestowed upon him.

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) used to enter his place of I'tikaaf before the sun set. If he wanted, for example, to spend the middle ten days of the month in I'tikaaf, he would enter his place of I'tikaaf before the sun set on the eleventh day. If he wanted to spend the last ten days in I'tikaaf, he would enter his place of I'tikaaf before the sun set on the twenty-first day.

Concerning the report in *al-Saheeh* that he (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) prayed Fajr and then entered his place of I'tikaaf (narrated by al-Bukhaari, 1928; Muslim, 1173; al-Tirmidhi, 791), what is meant here is that he entered the special place in the mosque after Fajr prayer. He used to do I'tikaaf in a place reserved especially for that, as it was reported in *Saheeh Muslim*, that he used to do I'tikaaf in a Turkish tent. (Narrated by Muslim, 1167).

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) used to put his head into 'Aa'ishah's apartment whilst he was in I'tikaaf in the mosque, and she should wash his hair and comb it, and she was menstruating, as was reported in *al-Saheehayn* (al-Bukhaari, 1924, 1926; Muslim, 297).

In *Musnad Ahmad* it was reported that he would lean in the doorway of her room, then he would put his head out, and she would comb his hair. (Ahmad, 6/272).

This indicates that if a person in I'tikaaf puts part of his body – such as his foot or his head – outside of the place where he is doing I'tikaaf, there is nothing wrong with that, and if a woman who is menstruating puts her hand or foot into the mosque, there is nothing wrong with it, there is nothing wrong with that because this is not counted as entering the mosque.

Another thing that we learn from this hadeeth is that there is nothing wrong with the person in I'tikaaf keeping clean and perfuming himself, and washing and combing his hair. None of these things affect his I'tikaaf.

Another of the things that happened to the Prophet (peace and

blessings of Allaah be upon him) in his I'tikaaf was narrated by the two shaykhs (al-Bukhaari and Muslim) from 'Aa'ishah (may Allaah be pleased with her), who said: "When the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) wanted to go into I'rikaaf, he would pray Fajr, then go into the place where he did I'tikaaf. He commanded that a tent be put up, and it was done. Some of the other wives of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) commanded that tents be put up, and this was done. When he (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) had prayed Fajr he looked and saw the tents, and said: "Are you seeking to do a righteous deed?" Then he commanded that his tent should be dismantled, and he did not do I'tikaaf in that month, delaying it until the first ten days of Shawwaal. (al-Bukhaari, 1928; Muslim, 1173).

The phrase "Are you seeking to do a righteous deed?" means, Is your motive for doing this the desire to do good, or is it jealousy and the desire to be close to the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him)?

It is most likely – and Allaah knows best – that his I'tkaaf in Shawwaal of that year was after the Eid, i.e., the second of Shawwaal.

It may be that it started on the day of Eid. If this is true, then it is an indication that fasting is not a condition of I'tikaaf, because there is no fasting on the day of Eid.

Something else that happened to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) in his I'tikaaf and was narrated by the two shaykhs (al-Bukhaari and Muslim) was that Safiyyah the wife of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) came and visited him during his I'tikaaf in the mosque during the last ten days of Ramadaan. She spoke with him for a while, then she stood up to go home. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) stood up with her to take her back, then when she reached the door of the mosque, by the door of Umm Salamah, two men of the Ansaar passed by and greeted the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him). The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said to them, "Wait, this is Safiyyah bint Huyay." They said, "*Subhaan Allaah*, O Messenger of Allaah!" They felt distressed (that he thought they might think something bad). The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "The Shaytaan is as close to a man as his blood." According to another report: "(Shaytaan) flows through the veins of a man like blood." "I was afraid that the Shaytaan might cast some evil ideas into your hearts."

He (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) was keen that the two Ansaaris should remain steadfast in their faith, and he was afraid that the Shaytaan might plant some evil thoughts in their hearts, making them doubt the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), which would have led them to kufr, or that they might be distracted by trying to rid themselves of these insinuations, so he (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) explained the matter to them so as to remove any possible doubts or insinuating whispers. So he told them that was Safiyyah bint Huyay (may Allaah be pleased with her), and she was his wife.

His guidance concerning I'tikaaf

The guidance of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) is the most perfect and straightforward of guidance and teaching. When he wanted to do I'tikaaf, he would have a bed or mattress put in the mosque for him, behind the Column of Repentance, as reported in the hadeeth from Naafi' from Ibn 'Umar from the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him): "When he (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) wanted to do I'tikaaf, he would have his mattress or his bed placed behind the Column of Repentance." (Narrated by Ibn Maajah, 1/564).

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) used to have a tent put up for him, and he would stay in it, apart from the times of prayer, so that he could be truly secluded. This was in the mosque and it is probable that the tent would be placed over his bed or mattress, as reported in the hadeeth of 'Aa'ishah (may Allaah be pleased with her), who said: "The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) used to do I'tikaaf in the last ten days of Ramadaan, and I used to put up a tent for him. He would pray Fajr, then go into the tent…" (Narrated by al-Bukhaari, 4/810, Fath al-Baari).

He used to stay in the mosque all the time and not go out except in the case of "human need", i.e. to pass urine or stools. 'Aa'ishah (may Allaah be pleased with her) said: "… he would not enter the house unless he needed to, when he was in I'tikaaf." (Narrated by al-Bukhaari, 4/808 *Fath al-Baari*).

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) used to have his food and drink brought to him when he was in I'tikaaf, as Saalim narrated: "His food and drink were brought to him in the place where he was doing I'tikaaf." (p.75).

He (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) used to keep clean,

as he used to put his head out into ‘Aa’ishah’s room for her to comb his hair. According to a hadeeth narrated from ‘Urwah from ‘Aa’ishah (may Allaah be pleased with her), she used to comb the hair of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) when he was in I’tikaaf and she was menstruating, and he was in I’tikaaf in the mosque, and she was in her room; he would lean his head towards her. (Narrated by al-Bukhaari, 4/807 *Fath al-Baari*).

Ibn Hajar said:

“The hadeeth indicates that it is permissible to keep clean, apply perfume, wash, shave and adorn oneself, by analogy with combing. The majority agree that there is nothing makrooh in I’tikaaf except that which is viewed as being makrooh in the mosque.” (4/807 *Fath al-Baari*).

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) did not visit the sick or attend funerals when he was in I’tikaaf, so that he could focus and devote all his attention to worshipping Allaah. According to a hadeeth narrated from ‘Aa’ishah: “The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) would pass by a sick person when he was in I’tikaaf, and he would not stop to ask him how he was.” It was also reported from ‘Urwah that she said: “The Sunnah for the person who is in I’tikaaf is that he should not visit the sick or attend funerals, or touch his wife or have intercourse with her, or go out for any but the most pressing of needs. There is no I’tikaaf except with fasting, and there is no I’tikaaf except in a Jaami’ Masjid.” (Narrated by Abu Dawood, 2/333).

The wives of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) used to visit him in the place where he was doing I’tikaaf. It so happened that he came out to take one of them home, and this was for a reason, as it was night time. This was reported in the hadeeth of ‘Ali ibn al-Husayn: “Safiyyah (may Allaah be pleased with her) came to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) when he was in I’tikaaf, and when she went back he walked with her. A man from among the Ansaar saw him, and when he [the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him)] saw him, he called him and said, ‘Come here, this is Safiyyah.’” Sufyaan [one of the narrators] may have said: “This is Safiyyah; for the Shaytaan runs through the veins of the son of Adam like blood.’” I [one of the narrators] said to Sufyaan, ‘Did she come to him at night?’ He said, ‘Could she have come at any time other than at night?’ (Narrated by al-Bukhaari, 4/819).

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) thought that

it was essential for him to go out with her (may Allaah be pleased with her) because it was night, so he went out with her from the place where he was doing I'tikaaf, in order to take her home.

In conclusion therefore: the example of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) was characterized by striving, and he spent most of the time in the mosque, devoting himself to worshipping Allaah and seeking Laylat al-Qadr.

The aims of I'tikaaf

0. seeking Laylat al-Qadr.
1. Being alone with Allaah, may He be glorified, and keeping away from people as much as possible, so that one may be entirely focused on Allaah and on remembering Him.
2. Purifying one's heart. He did not let himself become dishevelled at all when he devoted himself to worshipping Allaah.
3. Devoting oneself completely to pure worship, praying, making du'aa', remembering Allaah and reading Qur'aan.
4. Protecting one's fast from everything of one's selfish desires that could affect it.
5. Reducing one's involvement in permissible worldly matters and ignoring many of them at the time when one is able to deal with them.

Different types of I'tikaaf

Waajib (obligatory): this can only be as the result of a vow. Whoever vows to do I'tikaaf is obliged to do it. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "Whoever vows to obey Allaah, let him obey Him; and whoever vows to disobey Allaah (commit a sin), let him not do that." According to a hadeeth, Ibn 'Umar (may Allaah be pleased with him) said: 'Umar asked the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), "I made a vow during the Jaahiliyyah to spend one night in I'tikaaf in al-Masjid al-Haraam.' He said, 'Fulfil your vow.'" (al-Bukhaari, 4/809)

Mandoob (recommended): This is what was the habit of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), when he

did I’tikaaf during the last ten days of Ramadaan, and he persisted in doing this. It is *Sunnah Mu’akkadah* (confirmed Sunnah) which is known from his life (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), as was reported in the ahaadeeth referred to when we discussed the fact that I’tikaaf is prescribed in Islam.

<u>The ruling on I’tikaaf</u>

It is *Sunnah Mu’akkadah* (confirmed Sunnah), an action which the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) always did, and he made up some of it that he missed. ‘Azzaam said concerning this: “*Al-masnoon* (the Sunnah) is that which the Muslim does voluntarily to draw closer to Allaah, seeking to earn reward from Him and following the example of the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him). It was reported that he did this and persisted in it.” (p.114).

<u>The conditions of I’tikaaf</u>

Certain conditions apply to I’tikaaf, as follows:

6. Islam; I’tikaaf on the part of a kaafir is not valid, as is also the case with an apostate who has left the religion.

7. Discernment; it is not valid on the part of a child who has not yet reached the age of discernment.

8. Purity (tahaarah) from major forms of impurity (janaabah – sexual impurity, Hayd – menstruation; Nifaas – post-partum bleeding). If any of these things happen to a person during his I’tikaaf, he has to leave the mosque, because it is not permissible for him to stay in the mosque in this state.

9. It should be in the mosque. Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“And do not have sexual relations with them (your wives) while you are in I‘tikaaf (i.e. confining oneself in a mosque for prayers and invocations leaving the worldly activities) in the mosques” [al-Baqarah 2:187].

It is preferable for I’tikaaf to be in a mosque where Jumu’ah (Friday) prayers are held, so that one will not have to go out of the mosque in order to attend Jumu’ah

> prayers.
>
> Some scholars said that there should not be any I’tikaaf except in the three mosques: al-Masjid al-Haraam [in Makkah], al-Masjid al-Aqsaa [in al-Quds/Jerusalem] and al-Masjid al-Nabawi [in Madeenah]. The correct view is that I’tikaaf is permissible in any mosque in which the five obligatory prayers are prayed. Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):
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> *“And do not have sexual relations with them (your wives) while you are in I‘tikaaf (i.e. confining oneself in a mosque for prayers and invocations leaving the worldly activities) in the mosques” [al-Baqarah 2:187]*. The general meaning of the phrase *in the mosques* implies that it is permissible in every mosque. It is mustahabb to do I’tikaaf in a Jaami’ mosque (one in which Jumu’ah prayers are offered) so that the one who is doing I’tikaaf will not need to go out for Jumu’ah.

With regard to the hadeeth, “There is no I’tikaaf except in the three mosques” (narrated by al-Tahhaawi in *Mushkil al-Athaar*, 4/20), if we accept it as saheeh, it should be interpreted as meaning that the best I’tikaaf is in these mosques, as the scholars said.

It may be that what was meant by the words, “There is no I’tikaaf except in the three mosques”, is that there should be no I’tikaaf for which one makes a vow or for the purpose of which one travels. I’tikaaf is valid in all mosques. The imaams – especially the four imaams – agreed that I’tikaaf is valid in all Jaami’ mosques. Nothing was transmitted to the effect that I’tikaaf is not valid unless it is in one of the three mosques, from any well known, imaam, not the four imaams nor the ten imaams, or any others. This was reported only from Hudhayfah (may Allaah be pleased with him) and one or two of the Salaf.

If a person vows to do I’tikaaf in al-Masjid al-Haraam, he has to fulfil his vow and do I’tikaaf in al-Masjid al-Haraam. But if he vows, for example, to do I’tikaaf in al-Masjid al-Nabawi, then it is permissible for him to do I’tikaaf in al-Masjid al-Nabawi or in al-Masjid al-Haraam, because al-Masjid al-Haraam is better.

If he vowed to do I’tikaaf in al-Masjid al-Aqsaa, it is permissible for him to do I’tikaaf in al-Masjid al-Aqsaa or in al-Masjid al-Haraam or in al-Masjid al-Nabawi, because they are better than al-Masjid al-

Aqsaa.

<u>The pillars of I'tikaaf</u>

Intention (*niyyah*). 'Umar ibn al-Khattaab (may Allaah be pleased with him) said: I heard the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) say: 'Actions are but by intentions and every man shall have but that which he intended. So he whose migration was for Allaah and His Messenger, his migration was for Allaah and His Messenger, and he whose migration was to achieve some worldly benefit or to take some woman in marriage, his migration was for that for which he intended.'" (Al-Bukhaari, 1/15)

Staying in the mosque. As it says in the aayah (interpretation of the meaning): "*We commanded Ibraaheem and Ismaa'eel that they should purify My House (the Ka'bah at Makkah) for those who are circumambulating it, or staying (I'tikaaf), or bowing or prostrating themselves (there, in prayer).*" *[al-Baqarah 2:125]*. This confirms that the place of I'tikaaf is the mosque. This is also indicated by the actions of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) and by his wives and companions after him (may Allaah be pleased with them all). And in the hadeeth from Yoonus ibn Zayd that Naafi told him from 'Abd-Allaah ibn 'Umar (may Allaah be pleased with them both) that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) used to do I'tikaaf in the last ten days of Ramadaan, Naafi said, 'Abd-Allaah (may Allaah be pleased with him) showed me the spot where the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) used to do I'tikaaf in the mosque. (Reported by Muslim, 8/308).

<u>The place, time and starting point of I'tikaaf</u>

The place of I'tikaaf is the mosque, as indicated in the aayah (interpretation of the meaning): *"And do not have sexual relations with them (your wives) while you are in I'tikaaf (i.e. confining oneself in a mosque for prayers and invocations leaving the worldly activities) in the mosques" [al-Baqarah 2:187]*.

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) and his wives and companions (may Allaah be pleased with them all) used to do I'tikaaf in the mosques, and it is not reported that any of them did I'tikaaf in any place other than the mosque.

The timing of I'tikaaf is during Ramadaan and it is best to be done during the last ten days of the month. But it is permissible at any time

during Ramadaan and at other times. It is not restricted to a specific time; indeed it is mustahabb at all times, and it is obligatory if a person makes a vow committing himself to it. Ibn 'Umar (may Allaah be pleased with them both) reported that 'Umar asked the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), "I made a vow during the Jaahiliyyah that I would spend a night in I'tikaaf in al-Masjid al-Haraam." He said, "Fulfil your vow." (al-Bukhaari, 4/809).

The beginning of I'tikaaf is before sunset, for the person who wants to spend a day and night or longer in I'tikaaf. Some scholars said that a person should enter his place of I'tikaaf at Fajr.

The adab (etiquette) of I'tikaaf

There is a certain etiquette which it is mustahabb for the person in I'tikaaf to follow so that his I'tikaaf will be acceptable. The more he adheres to this etiquette, the greater his reward from the Lord of the Worlds will be, and the less he follows it, the less his reward will be.

It is mustahabb for the person in I'tikaaf to keep himself busy with prayer, reading Qur'aan, remembering Allaah (dhikr) and other kinds of pure worship. He should avoid all kinds of words and actions which will not help him to do this. He should not talk too much, because the one who talks too much, is more likely to say wrong things, and because the hadeeth says, "Part of a person's being a good Muslim is that he leaves alone that which does not concern him." He should avoid arguing, disputing, swearing and speaking in an obscene manner, for all of that is makrooh when he is not in I'tikaaf, so it is even more makrooh when he is in I'tikaaf; he should not invalidate his I'tikaaf by doing any of these things. There is nothing wrong with his speaking when he has to, or conversing with others. The two shaykhs (al-Bukhaari and Muslim) narrated that Safiyyah, the wife of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), came to visit him during his I'tikaaf in the mosque during the last ten days of Ramadaan. She spoke with him for a while, then she got up to leave. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) stood up to go with her, and when she reached the door of the mosque, by the door of Umm Salamah, two men of the Ansaar passed by and greeted the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him). The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said to them, "Wait, this is Safiyyah bint Huyay." They said, "*Subhaan Allaah*, O Messenger of Allaah!" They felt distressed (that he thought they might think something bad). The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "The Shaytaan is as close to a man as his blood." According to another report: "(Shaytaan) flows through the veins of a

man like blood." "I was afraid that the Shaytaan might cast some evil ideas into your hearts."

Al-Haafiz said:

We learn a number of things from this hadeeth:

It is permissible for the person who is in I'tikaaf to do permissible things such as seeing a visitor out and talking with him, and it is permissible for him to be alone and for a woman to visit him.

'Abd al-Razzaaq narrated that 'Ali said: Whoever does I'tikaaf should not engage in obscene speech or swear; he should attend Jumu'ah and funerals, and talk to his family if he needs to, but he should remain standing and not sit with them.

With regard to teaching Qur'aan and other (Islamic) knowledge, studying, debating with the fuqahaa', sitting with them and writing down ahaadeeth, there is a difference of opinion among the scholars. According to Imaam Ahmad, this is not recommended (not mustahabb), because the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) used to do I'tikaaf and it was not reported that he did anything except devote himself to acts of worship.

Al-Marwazi said:

I said to 'Abd-Allaah that a man was teaching Qur'aan to others in the mosque and he wanted to do I'tikaaf and perhaps he would complete the Qur'aan each day. He said:

If he does that, it will be for himself, but if he sits in the mosque it will be for himself and for others; I prefer for him to teach others.

The view of al-Shaafa'i, as recorded in *al-Mughni*, was: that it is mustahabb because it is the best kind of worship and its benefit is not limited to only one person.

The view of Imaam Ahmad is better, and Allaah knows best.

NB (1): some people see I'tikaaf as an opportunity to be with some of their friends and spend time chatting with them. This is not good.

There is nothing wrong with a group of people doing I'tikaaf in the mosque, because the wives of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) did I'tikaaf with him, and one of them even did

I’tikaaf with him when she was experiencing Istihaadah (non-menstrual bleeding), but she was in the mosque with him. (Narrated by al-Bukhaari, 303, 304). So there is nothing wrong with a person doing I’tikaaf with his friend or relative, but the problem arises when I’tikaaf is regarded as an opportunity to stay up late chatting and gossiping, etc. Hence Imaam Ibn al-Qayyim, after referring to what some ignorant people do by treating I’tikaaf as an opportunity to get together and visit with one another and chat, said: “This is one thing, and the I’tikaaf of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) was something else altogether.” (*Zaad al-Ma’aad*).

NB (2): Some people leave their work and neglect their obligations in order to do I’tikaaf. This is not the right attitude, because it is not right for a person to ignore something obligatory in order to do something that is Sunnah. The one who has left his work in order to do I’tikaaf has to stop his I’tikaaf and go back to work so that his earnings will be halaal. But if he can do I’tikaaf during his time off from work, or if he can make an arrangement with his boss, then this is very good.

Things which are forbidden in I’tikaaf

1. Going out of the mosque. I’tikaaf becomes invalid if a person goes out of the mosque for no reason, because the Messenger (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) did not go out of the mosque except in the case of “human need” i.e., to eat, if it was not possible to have food brought to him. Food used to be brought to him in the mosque, because Saalim says: “As for his food and drink, it was brought to him where he was in his place of I’tikaaf.”

   He also used to go out to purify himself from minor impurities and to do wudoo’, as ‘Aa’ishah (may Allaah be pleased with her) said: “The Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) used to put his head into my room whilst he was in the mosque, and I would comb his hair. He would not enter the house except in the case of need when he was in I’tikaaf.” (*Fath al-Baari*, 4/808).

2. Touching women with desire – including intercourse. This is something which invalidates I’tikaaf, because it is clearly stated that this is not permitted, in the aayah (interpretation of the meaning): *“And do not have sexual relations with them (your wives) while you are in I‘tikaaf (i.e. confining oneself in a mosque for prayers and invocations leaving the worldly*

activities) in the mosques” [al-Baqarah 2:187].

3. Menstruation and post-natal bleeding. If a woman who is in I’tikaaf starts to menstruate or experiences post-natal bleeding, she has to leave the mosque, so as to preserve the purity of the mosque. The same applies to anyone who is in a state of junub (impurity following sexual discharge) – until he does ghusl.

4. To complete ‘iddah. If the husband of a woman who is in I’tikaaf dies and she is in the mosque, she has to leave the mosque so that she can do her ‘iddah in her house.

5. Apostasy or leaving Islam. One of the conditions of I’tikaaf is Islam, so the I’tikaaf of an apostate (a person who has left Islam) does not count.

Educational aspects of I’tikaaf

1. Implementing the concept of worship in a complete fashion:

I’tikaaf plants in the soul of the person who does it the concept of true enslavement to Allaah (‘uboodiyyah), and trains him in this important matter for which man was created. For Allaah (may He be exalted) says (interpretation of the meaning): *“And I (Allaah) created not the jinn and mankind except that they should worship Me (Alone).” [al-Dhaariyaat 51:56]*. For the person who is in I’tikaaf has devoted his whole self and his whole time to worship Allaah, may He be glorified.

His whole purpose is to earn the pleasure of Allaah, may He be exalted, so he strives with his body, senses and time for this purpose, by praying fard and naafil prayers, by making du’aa’ and dhikr, by reading the Qur’aan, and other kinds of acts of worship.

Through this training during the best days of the month of Ramadaan, the person in I’tikaaf trains himself to apply the concept of ‘uboodiyyah or enslavement to Allaah in his public and private life, and he strives to put into practice the words of the aayah (interpretation of the meaning): *“Say (O Muhammad): “Verily, my Salaat (prayer), my sacrifice, my living, and my dying are for Allaah, the Lord of the ‘Aalameen (mankind, jinn and all that exists). He has no partner. And of this I have been commanded, and I am the first of the Muslims.” [al-An’aam 6:162-163]*

Al-Qurtubi said: “*my living* means, whatever I do in my life; *my dying* means what I advise you to do after my death; *for Allaah, the Lord of the ‘Aalameen* means, they are only for the purpose of drawing closer to Him.” (7/69).

2. Seeking Laylat al-Qadr

   This was the main purpose behind the I’tikaaf of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him). At first his I’tikaaf lasted for the entire month, then he did I’tikaaf during the middle ten days, seeking Laylat al-Qadr. When he learned that it is in the last ten days of the month of Ramadaan, he limited his I’tikaaf to these blessed ten days.

3. Getting accustomed to staying in the mosque

The person in I’tikaaf has committed himself to staying in the mosque for a specific time period. Human nature may not readily accept such restrictions at the beginning of the I’tikaaf, but usually this attitude quickly disappears because of the peace of mind that the Muslim soul develops from staying in the House of Allaah.

The person in I’tikaaf understands the importance of his staying in the mosque during his I’tikaaf from the following things:

1. The person who stays in the mosque finds that the mosque becomes dear to him, and he understands the value of the houses of Allaah, may He be exalted. This love has a great value with Allaah, because those who love the houses of Allaah will be one of the groups whom Allaah will shade on the Day when there will be no shade except His shade.

2. When a person stays in the mosque, whilst he is waiting for the prayer, he is rewarded as for praying, and the angels pray for forgiveness for him. According to the hadeeth narrated by Abu Hurayrah (may Allaah be pleased with him), the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “The angels will pray for blessings for any one of you as long as he stays in his place of prayer and as long as nothing happens to break his wudoo’. [They say:] ‘O Allaah, forgive him, O Allaah have mercy on him.’ As long as any one of you stays in his place of prayer, as long as what is keeping him there is the fact that he is waiting for the prayer, and nothing is keeping him from going back to his family apart from his prayer.” (al-Bukhaari, 2/360 *Fath al-Baari*).

3. Keeping away from physical luxuries.

   In I'tikaaf a person reduces a lot of these things and becomes like a stranger in this world, so "give good news to the stranger." For the sake of earning the pleasure of Allaah, he is content to stay in a corner of the mosque with usually no more than a pillow on which to lay his head and a blanket with which to cover himself, for he has left his comfortable bed and his usual habits for the sake of earning Allaah's pleasure.

   As for his food, this is a different story, if it is not what he usually eats. If he has food brought from his house, usually it will not be as much as he would eat at home, and he does not eat it at a table with his wife and children, as he would usually do. On the contrary, he eats like a stranger, like a poor slave who is need of his Lord. If he goes out to the market-place to get food, he tries hard to take what is available and he is not too fussy about what kind of food he gets, because he has to go back to his place of I'tikaaf and not take too long to do these things. Thus he learns that he can get by with a little, for which his Lord will be pleased with him, just as he can live with much, for which his Lord will not be pleased with him – and the different between the two is immense.

1. Giving up many harmful habits

In the light of the fact that the concept of Islamic education is lacking in many Muslim societies and in many homes in those Muslim societies, many habits have become widespread which go against the teachings of this pure religion. These evil habits have become so widespread that they have become almost acceptable and are not seen as having any harmful impact either on the religion or the individual. These habits include smoking, listening to music and watching scenes and events broadcast by satellite channels which go against the 'aqeedah (belief) of the Muslim and his sense of modesty and chastity, and other habits which affect the religion and the individual.

The time of I'tikaaf gives the individual the opportunity to see the falsehood of these habits and the futility of the belief which many Muslims have, that they do not have the ability to rid themselves of these habits, because they have gained control over them.

During the period of I'tikaaf, when he is alone with his Creator, the

Muslim comes to understand the concept of worship in the most comprehensive sense and that he has to be enslaved to Allaah every hour of the day, in both his public and his private life. When he takes the pleasure and love of Allaah as the yardstick against which he measures all his actions, he will find that the habits we have referred to above, and many others, do not agree with that love of Allaah, and indeed they are the opposite. So he discovers that habits such as these take him out of the circle of sincere ‘uboodiyyah towards Allaah. If this is the case, then he is obliged to rid himself of these habits as quickly as possible.

During the period of I’tikaaf, the Muslim is not allowed to go out except in the case of definite needs which serve to facilitate his staying in the mosque for I’tikaaf. Apart from that, he should not go out, even if it is for a permissible purpose. So – for example – he cannot go out and walk around in the market-place, even for a short time, to buy things that have nothing to do with his I’tikaaf. If he goes out to buy siwaak, this will not affect his I’tikaaf because it is something that is required for his prayer during his I’tikaaf. But if he went out to buy a gift for his wife or for one of his children, that would invalidate his I’tikaaf, because the Messenger (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) did not go out except in the case of “human need”, as mentioned above. So how about if the person in I’tikaaf goes out to do something haraam such as smoking cigarettes for example, or to watch a satellite TV show that he usually watches? Undoubtedly this would invalidate his I’tikaaf.

So if he goes out to drink wine or to smoke, this invalidates his I’tikaaf. In general, any going out for any invalid reason invalidates one's I’tikaaf, and more so if the purpose of going out is to commit a sin. Even when he goes out for a legitimate purpose, it is not permissible for him to light a cigarette on the way.

I’tikaaf is an annual opportunity in which a person can get rid of these bad habits by repenting and turning to Allaah, and by weaning himself from these sins during the period of I’tikaaf, not giving in to his desires, and getting used to this.

This continual worship of Allaah requires continual patience on the part of the person in I’tikaaf, which is a kind of training for a person's will and a kind of self-discipline for the soul which usually tries to escape this worship to turn towards other matters which it desires.

There is also the kind of patience which is required for dealing with the absence of things which a person may be used to, such as different

kinds of food that he eats at home but which are not available in the mosque. So he puts up with having little for the sake of earning the pleasure of Allaah, may He be exalted and glorified.

And there is the kind of patience which is required for putting up with the place where he is sleeping, for he will not have a bed put in the mosque for him, or a comfortable mattress on which he could sleep. He sleeps on a very modest mattress or even on the carpets in the mosque.

And there is the kind of patience which is required for putting up with the conditions in the mosque, the crowds of people around him, the lack of peace and quiet such as he enjoys at home when he wants to sleep.

And there is the kind of patience which is required for suppressing his desire for his wife, with whom he is not allowed to have sexual relations if he goes home for any purpose; he cannot even kiss her or hug her, even though she is halaal for him. Thus the value of patience, strong will power and self-control is manifested. Through these practices and others, a person can train himself to delay many of the things he desires for the sake of things which are more important, so he puts off these psychological and material needs for the sake of earning the pleasure of Allaah, may He be glorified and exalted.

(9) Peace of mind

(10) Reading the Qur'aan and completing it

(11) Sincere repentance

(12) Qiyaam al-Layl (praying at night) and getting used to it

(13) Making good use of one's time

(14) Purifying one's soul

(15) Reforming one's heart and focusing on Allaah.

We ask Allaah to help us to remember Him, thank Him and worship Him properly. And Allaah knows best. May Allaah bless our Prophet Muhammad.

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